

SERVICE QUALITY MEASUREMENT OF CROATIAN TELEVISION NEWS: AN APPLICATION OF THE MODIFIED SERVQUAL MODEL

Jelena Komšić*

Iva Valčić*

ABSTRACT

In today's competitive environment, all service providers must achieve a high level of service quality, regardless of the type. Since we all are being confronted on a daily basis with new ways of sharing information, television news need to offer service quality to retain and increase their presence in today's market and as well as their number of viewers. Despite the fact that the concept of service quality has gained much attention in the past 30 years, there is an evident gap in the literature concerning news service quality. This research paper examines television news service quality offered by the Croatian national broadcasting company, the Croatian Radiotelevision. In order to assess service quality in television news, an empirical investigation was carried out and a modified SERVQUAL model was used. A total of 212 respondents were employed to estimate their expectations and perceptions of television news service quality, using an on-site and self-administered questionnaire. The statistical analysis included descriptive statistical analysis and a t-test. The results indicate that television news service offered by Croatian Radiotelevision did not match the viewers' expectations, and the gaps of all five dimensions were negative, suggesting that viewers have an overall negative perception about the television news service quality. The findings of the study can be used for improving the television news service quality and to help understand its importance. The authors are contributing to the existing literature by confirming the applicability of the SERVQUAL model for service quality measurement of television news.

KEYWORDS service quality, SERVQUAL, television news, statistical analysis, Croatia

* University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija

Introduction

In today's world, television is a well-recognized type of media the presence of which is influential and substantial. As stated by Bourdieu (1998), we are getting closer and closer to the point where the social world is primarily described-and in a sense prescribed-by television. And the news has long been regarded as one of the most important services provided by television (Gunter, 2005). Television news have a key meaning for the informative function of media (Perišin, 2008a) and there is consistent evidence, internationally, that people place a great deal of trust in television as an informational medium (Gunter, 2005). Television viewing has multiple effects on individual consumers as well as on society and it solely depends upon the quality of programs broadcasted in order to influence the general public (Mursaleen et al., 2014). Having such big influence on informing the society about current and relevant events and information, it is important that television news are both of high quality and that they are offering a high quality service.

Zaller (1999) defines high quality news as information about matters of general political or social significance. However, what about the service quality of news?

Changes in society and the rapid development of technology affect the constant redefinition of news values, especially in the medium of television (Perišin, 2008b). These changes also have an effect on the offered service quality of television news which needs to be ameliorated in order to meet viewer expectations. Amelioration can be achieved by measurements which allow for comparison before and after changes, for the location of quality related problems and for the establishment of clear standards for service delivery (Rakesh, 2012).

It is clearly necessary to strive for determined, reliable, responsible and impartial news reporting (Laban, 2007). As stated by Zaller (1999), there is a need to think more realistically about the nature of "news quality" in light of the interests of those who produce and those who consume news. According to Johnson in a world of information excess the nature and experience of information is bound to change (Costera Meijer, 2006), and television news need to react to these changes by providing a higher service quality. Since viewers and the television interact (Fiske, 1987), and moreover, since a lot of critics discuss shift to the "experience economy", this means that a general service-oriented approach is needed that will ensure this media's success in the future as well (Costera Meijer, 2006). To do so, a

measurement of the service quality of television news needs to be employed and conducted. However, until now there were not many attempts from researchers to fill this gap and this topic has not been fully researched. Accordingly, this research contributes to the existing literature by investigating the applicability of the SERVQUAL model for the service quality measurement of television news.

Service quality and the SERVQUAL model

In the early 1980s, the impetus to measure and evaluate service quality arose from marketing (Cook and Thompson, 2000). According to Lewis (Frochot and Hughes, 2000), service quality has become the focus of any marketing strategy of services companies and high levels of service are seen as a means for an organisation to achieve a competitive advantage and position itself more effectively in the market place. It is worth mentioning that service quality is an abstract and elusive concept due to its three main characteristics: intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988), and these characteristics distinguish service quality from goods quality.

There are two important contributions to the definition of the service quality concept and they are centered in the perception that the client has of the quality delivered by the firm: the image model of Grönroos and the gap model of Parasuraman et al. (Loureiro and González 2009). Following the above mentioned, the work of Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml can be outlined as one of the most important for service quality measurement. The three collaborators concluded that quality could be viewed as the gap between perceived service and expected service, and their work eventually resulted in the Gap Theory of Service Quality, that is, $Q = P - E$ (quality equals perceptions - expectations) (Cook and Thompson, 2000). This theory brought up the SERVQUAL model, an instrument for measuring the gap between the service that consumers think should be provided and what they think actually has been provided (Stevens and Knutson, 1995).

In the original SERVQUAL model 10 dimensions were established, but due to the overlapping between dimensions during further study, the final version consists of five

dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, which Parasuraman et al. describe in following way:

- *Tangibles*: physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel.
- *Reliability*: ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
- *Responsiveness*: willingness to help consumers and provide prompt service.
- *Assurance*: knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.
- *Empathy*: caring, individualised attention the firm provides its customers.

Finally, a 22-item instrument was obtained and evaluated by respondents, according to Likert's seven-point scale (Nowacki, 2005).

The instrument has been designed to be applicable across a broad spectrum of services (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Items under each of the five dimensions can be suitably reworded and/or augmented to make them more germane to the context in which the instrument is to be used (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Accordingly, in the past the original SERVQUAL model or its modified version have been applied to a wide range of services and in the work of different authors (Saleh and Ryan 1991, Stevens and Knutson 1995, Cook and Thompson 2000, Frochot and Hughes 2000, Khan 2003, Nowacki 2005, Pakdil and Aydin 2007, Loureiro and González 2009, Škare et al. 2010, Rakesh 2012, Tsang et al. 2012, Marković et al. 2013, Mursaleen et al. 2014). The study of Mursaleen et al. (2014) made a meaningful contribution to the literature review, particularly important for this paper. This study investigated the service quality offered by Pakistani news channels by employing a modified SERVQUAL scale. The results revealed that the public does not place much trust on the credibility and quality of news channels which is an alarming sign in an era of high competition. Gaps were found in all the dimensions of the SERVQUAL while the largest gaps were observed under responsiveness and assurance dimensions.

Notwithstanding its growing popularity and widespread application, SERVQUAL has been subjected to a number of theoretical and operational criticisms (Buttle, 1996). However, SERVQUAL is still one of the most popular models for examining the quality of service. There is general agreement that the 22 SERVQUAL items are reliable predictors of overall service quality, with R^2 values ranging from 0.5 to 0.7 (Khan, 2003). Furthermore, due to its positive elements - simplicity of use and capabilities of the instrument for quantitative assessment

(Škare et al., 2010) and its potential to measure the quality in distinctive types of services, SERVQUAL is still, even after more than 25 years, a widely used model for measuring service quality.

Research methodology

The main purpose of this study was to empirically investigate the television news service quality offered by the Croatian Radiotelevision, the national public service broadcaster in Croatia. The idea for measuring television news service quality came from the fact that Asian customers' expectations and perceptions from news channels have recently been explored for the first time and that the television news represent an unexplored area.

The study intended to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of viewers' expectations regarding television news service quality?
2. What is the level of viewers' perceptions regarding television news service quality?
3. What are the differences between perceived and expected television news service quality?
4. What are the key dimensions of television news service quality expectations?
5. What are the key dimensions of television news service quality perceptions?

In order to answer the research questions, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H₁: The level of expected television news service quality is high.

H₂: The level of perceived television news service quality is high.

H₃: There is no statistically significant difference between expected and perceived television news service quality.

The instrument for collecting primary data in this study was an on-site and self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, designed to measure the expected and perceived service quality, as well as the demographic profile of the respondents. Based on the literature review the model was modified to meet the specific features of television news service. The level of expected and perceived service quality was measured on the basis of 32 attributes adopted from the Mursaleen et al. (2014) and Marković et al. (2013) study.

The data were gathered during a 2 week period in October 2014. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed and 212 questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 60.57 percent. The sample size is based on the recommended minimum level of at least five times as many observations as the number of variables to be analysed (Hair et al., 2006).

A convenience sample was used to collect the data, while an online survey was conducted through a social network. The expected and perceived service quality was assessed with a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). Data were analysed using the statistical package SPSS 12.0.

In order to meet the survey’s goals, descriptive statistics and a t-test were performed. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the respondents’ demographic profile and to evaluate their expected and perceived television news service quality. Using descriptive statistics the first two hypotheses were tested. The paired sample t-test was performed to determine the significance of differences between perceived and expected scores of service quality. At this stage, the third hypothesis was tested.

This study can help Croatian Radiotelevision owners and managers to improve their service quality and to ensure future public satisfaction.

Research results

A descriptive statistical analysis was performed on the respondents’ demographic variables. The results are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (N=212)

Items	Percentage	Item	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		<i>Age</i>	
Male	29.2	20 and less	1.4
Female	70.8	21-30	66.5
		31-40	15.2
<i>Level of education</i>		41-50	9.4

Secondary school	20.9	51-60	7.5
College and university	72.2	61 and above	0.0
MSc or PhD	7.1		

Occupation**How often do you watch TV?**

Rarely	15.6	Unemployed	15.1
Once a week	5.2	Employed	69.3
Several times a week	30.2	Student	15.6
Daily	49.1	Retired	0.0

Source: Authors

From the demographic profile it can be seen that female respondents (70.8 percent) outnumbered male respondents (29.2 percent). According to the age distribution, about 67 percent of the respondents were between 21 and 30 years old and completed college or a university education. Almost 70 percent were employed and half of the respondents watched TV on a daily basis.

Viewers' expectations and perceptions are measured on a five-point Likert-type scale, where the higher the score, the higher the expectation (perception) of television news service quality. Table 2 reports the results of the respondents' expectations and perceptions of television news service quality, as well as significant differences in the mean scores.

Table 2: Viewers' expectations and perceptions of television news service quality (N=212)

Attributes	Expectations		Perceptions		Gap	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
V1 – create awareness among public	4.55	0.792	3.38	0.963	-1.17	15.331	0.000
V2 – source of information	4.83	0.424	3.82	0.976	-1.01	13.898	0.000
V3 – provide truthful information	4.95	0.253	3.35	0.944	-1.60	23.367	0.000
V4 – depict true picture of politics	4.80	0.645	2.67	1.008	-2.13	26.083	0.000

Attributes	Expectations		Perceptions		Gap	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
V5 – breaking news do not create anxiety	4.05	1.008	3.07	1.125	-0.98	9.507	0.000
V6 –broadcast at the accurate time	4.74	0.635	4.71	0.582	-0.03	0.487	0.627
Mean RELIABILITY	4.65	-	3.50	-	-1.15	-	-
V7 – provide up to date information	4.74	0.536	3.89	0.850	-0.85	13.646	0.000
V8 –innovative in offering variety of programs	4.34	0.859	3.06	0.914	-0.28	15.640	0.000
V 9 – work to enhance viewer learning	4.37	0.896	3.00	1.023	-1.37	16.139	0.000
V10 – guide the youth	3.82	1.195	2.50	1.042	-1.32	13.195	0.000
V11 – provide education to viewers	4.19	0.994	2.85	1.015	-1.34	15.376	0.000
V12 – create social awareness	4.13	0.998	3.03	1.023	-1.10	12.102	0.000
V13 – provide information	4.66	0.645	3.42	0.912	-1.24	16.394	0.000
Mean RESPONSIVENESS	4.32	-	3.11	-	-1.21	-	-
V14 – convey positive message	3.86	1.158	2.67	0.981	-1.19	13.074	0.000
V15 –report corruption	4.59	0.818	2.91	1.040	-1.68	19.559	0.000
V16 – anchors behave in a decent manner while discussing serious issues	4.65	0.717	4.23	0.897	-0.42	5.746	0.000
V17 – interesting and entertaining programs	3.41	1.207	2.74	0.947	-0.67	7.332	0.000
V18 – depict a positive picture	3.03	1.278	2.59	0.967	-0.44	4.473	0.000
V19 – righteously use freedom of speech	4.61	0.662	3.12	1.075	-1.49	17.434	0.000
V20 – instill confidence	4.33	0.900	3.58	0.968	-0.75	9.166	0.000

Attributes	Expectations		Perceptions		Gap	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Mean ASSURANCE	4.07	-	3.12	-	-0.95	-	-
V21 – broadcasting without anxiety	3.65	1.127	3.04	0.999	-0.61	6.090	0.000
V22 – represent Croatian culture	3.79	1.061	3.01	0.946	-0.78	9.589	0.000
V23 – clean and neat anchors	4.05	0.930	4.10	0.800	0.05	-0.42	0.522
V24 – visually attractive studio	3.64	1.078	3.55	0.909	-0.09	0.953	0.341
V25 – modern looking studio	3.65	1.068	3.55	0.935	-0.10	1.054	0.293
Mean TANGIBLE	3,76	-	3,45	-	-0,31	-	-
V26 – entertaining news	2.73	1.211	2.39	0.994	-0.34	3.828	0.000
V27 – commercial-free	4.70	0.893	4.08	1.077	-0.62	6.723	0.000
V28 – do not waste time on irrelevant information	4.45	0.867	3.03	0.992	-1.42	15.021	0.000
V29 – offer customized programs at different timings	4.39	0.822	3.52	0.956	-0.87	10.774	0.000
V30 – provide information for welfare of society	4.31	0.818	3.17	0.949	-1.14	14.498	0.000
V31 – share news and other information at time convenient for viewers	4.38	0.876	4.14	0.911	-0.24	3.162	0.002
V32 – do not disturb the safe home environment	3.27	1.309	3.60	0.980	0.33	-3.039	0.003
Mean EMPATHY	4.03	-	3.42	-	-0,61	-	-
Overall mean (32 attributes)	4.18	-	3.31	-	-0.87	-	-

Note: Expectations and perceptions means range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree);

Source: Authors

As noted in Table 2, the mean scores of viewers' expectations are ranged from 2.73 to 4.95. The lowest expectation items were "entertaining news" (2.73), "depict a positive picture"

(3.03) and “do not disturb the safe home environment” (3.27), while the highest items were “provide truthful information” (4.95), “source of information” (4.83) and “depict true picture of politics” (4.80). The overall mean score for service quality expectation items was 4.18. This score indicates high expectations of the television news service.

The analysis of viewers’ perception indicated that the mean scores are ranged from 2.39 to 4.71. The lowest perception items were “entertaining news” (2.39) and “guide the youth” (2.50). On the other hand, the highest perception mean scores were “broadcast at the accurate time” (4.71), “anchors behave in a decent manner while discussing serious issues” (4.23) and “share news and other information at time convenient for viewers” (4.14). The overall mean score for service quality perception items was 3.31. This score indicates that there is a lot of room for improvement.

The gap analysis of expectation and perception scores for each item indicates 30 out of 32 negative gaps. The perceptions were higher than their expectations only in the following attributes: “do not disturb the safe home environment” (0.33) and “clean and neat anchors” (0.05). The overall gap is also negative (-0.61), implying that television news service did not match the viewers’ expectations.

According to the dimensions, all five gaps were negative. The largest gap was noted in the dimension “responsiveness” (-1.21) while the smallest in the dimension “tangibles” (-0.31). The overall gap was -0.87 indicating viewers’ dissatisfaction with television news service quality.

Comparing the results with Mursaleen et al. (2014), the largest gap was found in the difference between the expected and perceived quality in terms of “assurance” dimension (1.28). The dimension “responsiveness” has been evidenced as the second highest gap (1.13). The smallest gap was found in the dimension “empathy” (0.44), while in this study “empathy” was the second smallest gap (-0.61). It has been also noted that all five overall gaps in Muhammad et al. study were positive.

Further, the results of the paired samples t-test (Table 2) indicated that in 5 out of 32 television news service attributes significant differences were found between viewers’

perceptions and expectation of service quality. Just one of these five attributes' perception was higher than the expectation ("clean and neat anchors").

Conclusion

The present study aimed to test three research hypotheses. The highly rated overall mean scores for expectations scales confirmed the hypotheses H_1 . These results indicate that viewers of television news have high expectations regarding service quality. The second hypothesis is rejected because the perception mean scores were average and below average.

The comparison of the respondents' expectation and perception scores revealed that differences were significant in 5 out of 32 attributes. Hypothesis H_3 can be partially accepted. For one item the perception was higher than the expectation, implying that for the majority of examined attributes the perceived service quality was significantly below the viewers' expectations, which indicates room for future enhancement.

The respondents were free to indicate any further comments, suggestions and impressions at the end of the questionnaire. Generally, the respondents are distrustful about the news which confirms the low perception mean scores and negative dimension gaps. Many of them believe that the television news are manipulated by the government and other individuals. Furthermore, they stated that the program is based on trivial and nonessential news, while the bigger issues are being ignored.

The limitations consider the sample size and nature, as well as the structure of television news service attributes included in the study. Residents with different demographic characteristics were included in the sample and the convenience sampling procedure may have resulted with a sample that does not represent all the features of the target population. Although a set of television news service attributes included in the study covered a variety of television news aspects and the study is based on a previously tested methodology, there could be other relevant items that are likely to influence the visitors' opinions about their overall news experience. Nevertheless, these limitations do not diminish the validity and the relevance of the reported findings. They serve as a foundation for further research in this area.

Future research should expand the current study. Research should be conducted for several television news and channels with a more representative sample in order to ensure more comprehensive results. The questionnaire should be extended with different dimensions and attributes using a more complex statistical analysis (e.g. multivariate statistical analysis). This study should be repeated and compared with the current study to determine if the television news service has met viewer expectations and improved its quality. It may also be very interesting to measure and compare the service quality of several television news programmes at the same time.

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